

prove Luther's effective protector against a weak emperor, even though that emperor was the great Charles V. himself. Moreover, if it happened, as it occasionally did, that this emperor was the antagonist of the pope, he might even find a Charles V. among his indirect, if not his direct, patrons. Luther was a trump card for the politicians, whether imperial or princely, to play, on occasion, against a pontiff whose spiritual weapons of excommunication and interdict had long lost their edge. And we know enough of the social and economic grievances of the age to perceive that, on social and economic grounds, he could count on the adhesion of the masses. The masses were in truth ripe for social revolution as well as religious reformation, and their co-operation ere long became a source of embarrassment and danger to the spiritual movement initiated at Wittenberg.

However much Luther might seek to narrow the reform movement within the limit of his own spiritual experience, it was not possible to shake himself free from these political, intellectual, social influences of the time, and he in turn contributed by his reforming teaching and fervour to quicken these influences. He was or became, willingly or unwillingly? wittingly or unwittingly, the instrument, not merely of a religious reformation but of a many-sided revolution. He was the child of a new revolutionary age, though the age of revolution was by no means born with him. His mission could not be kept within the bounds of theology and ethics, must perforce touch the whole complexity of society. It must inevitably have a political bearing. Down with the Roman Antichrist, cried Luther. But the supremacy of the Roman Antichrist was incompatible with political as well as religious liberty, aroused the antagonism of the patriot as well as the religious reformer, and Luther is found inevitably standing on the same platform with Ulrich von Hutten. Nay, Luther played the patriot in this matter equally with the most militant anti-papal politicians, and it is not without reason that he bulks in the eyes of Protestant Germany as its greatest national hero. Even in the matter of internal politics he was destined to discover that he could not act an indifferent or theoretic part, and, after coquetting with the firebrands of the revolutionary party among the lesser nobility